

A VISION OF & FOR WOLDSON

Laura Sims was planning her path to medical school when a girl from her dorm at Auburn convinced her to audition for a part in their school production of “The Good Woman of Szechuan.” It was that small role and a stint in the costume shop that made her decide to change her major to theater. Long story short, she is planning the dedication of Gonzaga’s new Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center April 11 as its first director.

“Miss Woldson felt strongly that everyone should be able to use this space,” Sims says. “So we’ll accommodate a number of academic events, we’ll be presenting acts from all over the nation, and we are developing a vision for how our greater Spokane community can use this space, too.”

“We envision the Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center at Gonzaga as the hub of the arts in the Pacific Northwest region,” she says.

The Building – Three Distinct Parts

This 58,000-square-foot facility will showcase Gonzaga’s many choruses, bands, orchestra, theater and dance programs, in addition to touring acts and community events.

It is built in three sections, Sims explains. Each section is angled to respond to specific campus planning and emotional connections.

The western-most section of the building will house a collection of Miss Woldson’s artifacts, both actual and digital, and tell her life story through an interactive interpretive center. Digital Humanities Visiting Scholar Katey Roden and Associate Professor Veta Schlimgen, History, worked with students to create the content for the interactive displays. During most of Miss Woldson’s adult life she lived in a house on Sumner Boulevard, overlooking downtown. From her sitting room, she could see the bronze steeple of the Jundt Art Center and Museum. That sitting room as well as her home’s entry foyer, living room and dining room, will be recreated in this part of the building for visitors to see. Hence, this western facade faces her house to the southwest up on the ridge in south Spokane.

The center section will house the Mainstage Theater with what appears to be tubular tree trunks Theater, a magnificent 750-seat auditorium growing out of the angled walls and metal



The Mainstage Theater will showcase campus, community and traveling performers in this beautifully attired Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center opening in April.

mesh panels overhead, creating a canopy over the seating area, all designed to enhance acoustics in this state-of-the-art, multipurpose environment. This section also houses sound, lighting and projection booths and a 5,900-square-foot lobby area. The center section faces the river to the south and the Spokane community.

A Recital Hall comprises the east section of the facility. The open space includes telescopic seating for 198 audience members, and a sprung floor for ease on dancers’ legs. This space is designed for rehearsals and small theater/music/dance performances. Mirrored doors to the north can be folded out for practice and turned around for performances. This section of the building faces more toward campus, inviting the GU community to be a part of the events staged here.

“This three-angle construction is reminiscent of rock formations found in the area, shaped by water as it cascades over the rocks,” Sims says.

More About Mainstage Theater

The canopy of wire mesh and metal that form a forest-like cover over the seating area will provide a more intimate space and excellent acoustics.

“An actor or singer on stage can be heard as well at the back of the balcony as they can in the front row,” Sims explains. “The angled walls will reflect sound, as well.”

There will be seating on two levels, including 586 seats in the orchestra section including lower boxes, and 164 upper level balcony seats, including upper boxes.

The orchestra pit in front of the stage allows for three levels: below audience for an orchestra to play during a theater performance, for example; audience level as part of the 586 available seats; or above audience level that allows the stage to extend out into the audience for a more intimate performance, when required.

A counter-weight rigging system ‘flies’ in lighting instruments, scenery and soft goods, which allows for scene changes litterly on the fly. Sixteen trap doors on stage will allow for a Marley ghost coming up from the earth in “A Christmas Carol,” for example.

Director’s View

“We want to be able to provide an opportunity for the Gonzaga community to celebrate the arts and Miss Woldson’s life within this space,” says Sims. “To highlight the creative activity at Gonzaga and to serve the various communities on and off campus, our presenting events will serve multiple purposes. Some events will complement what the faculty are teaching in class. If a dance faculty member is teaching Latin dance, we may bring a flamenco group to provide a master class and a public performance. Other events will be unrelated to classroom topics so students and the community can experience something new.

“Most importantly, we want to make it affordable and accessible for everyone. Get off work or out of class, grab a bite, and then walk in as you are. I want the audience to feel at home coming into this space,” Sims says.